

A N. J. Recognition Souvenir Black Woman's Voice



National Council of Negro Women, Inc.

Volume 8, Number 1, June 1981



Mary McLeod Bethune was a great leader, educator and humanitarian. She founded the National Council of Negro Women. Because of her, Black women have a movement which nourishes and sustains growth, broadens vision, and which organizes power. Each is needed to continue the work she began. It is more important today than ever. The Bethune Recognition Program offers a very special opportunity to support Mrs. Bethune's ideals and to live the legacy of unity, commitment and self-reliance.

MY LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

by

Mary McLeod Bethune

Sometimes as I sit communing in my study I feel that death is not far off. I am aware that it will overtake me before the greatest of my dreams — full equality for the Negro in our time — is realized. Yet, I face the reality without fear or regrets. I am resigned to death as all humans must be at the proper time. Death neither alarms nor frightens one who has had a long career of fruitful toil. The knowledge that my work has been helpful to many fills me with joy and great satisfaction.

Since my retirement from an active role in educational work and from the affairs of the National Council of Negro Women, I have been living quietly and working at my desk at my home here in Florida. The years have directed a change of pace for me. I am now 76 years old and my activities are no longer so strenuous as they once were. I feel that I must conserve my strength to finish the work at hand.

Already, I have begun working on my autobiography which will record my life's journey in detail, together with the innumerable side trips which have carried me abroad, into every corner of our country, into homes, both lowly and luxurious, and even into the White House to confer with the Presidents. I have also deeded my home and its contents to the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation, organized in 1953, for research, interracial activity and sponsorship of wider educational opportunities.

Sometimes I ask myself if I have any other legacy to leave. Truly, my worldly possessions are few. Yet, my experiences have been rich. From them I have distilled principles and policies in which I believe firmly, for they represent the meaning of my life's work. They are the products of much sweat and sorrow. Perhaps, in them there is something of value. So, as my life draws to a close, I will pass them on to Negroes everywhere in the hope that an old woman's philosophy may give them inspiration. Here, then, is my legacy.

I Leave You Love. Love builds. It is positive and helpful. It is more beneficial than hate. Injuries quickly forgotten quickly pass away. Personally and racially, our enemies must be forgiven. Our aim must be to create a world of fellowship and justice where no man's skin, color or religion, is held against him. "Love thy neighbor" is a precept which could transform the world if it were universally practiced. It connotes brotherhood and to me, brotherhood of man is the noblest concept in all human relations. Loving your neighbor means being interracial, interreligious, and international.

I Leave You Hope. growth will be great in the years to come. Yesterday, our ancestors endured the degradation of slavery, yet they retained their dignity. Today, we direct our economic and political strength toward winning a more abundant and secure life. Tomorrow, a new Negro, unhampered by race taboos and shackles, will benefit from more than 330 years of ceaseless striving and struggle. Theirs will be a better world. This I believe with all my heart.

I Leave You The Challenge Of Developing Confidence In One Another. As long as Negroes are hemmed into racial blocs of prejudice and pressure, it will be necessary for them to band together for economic betterment. Negro banks, insurance companies and other businesses are examples of successful racial economic enterprises. These institutions were made possible by vision and mutual aid. Confidence was vital in getting them started and keeping them going. Negroes have got to demonstrate still more confidence in each other in business. This kind of confidence will aid the economic rise of the race by bringing together the pennies and dollars of our people and ploughing them into useful channels. Economic separatism cannot be tolerated in this enlightened age, and it is not practicable. We must spread out as far and as fast as we can, but we must also help each other as we go.

I Leave You A Thirst For Education. Knowledge is the prime need of the hour. More and more, Negroes are taking full advantage of hard-won opportunities for learning, and the educational level of the Negro population is at its highest point in history. We are making greater use of the privileges inherent in living in democracy. If we continue in this trend, we will be able to rear increasing numbers of strong purposeful men and women, equipped with vision, mental clarity, health and education.

I Leave You A Respect For The Use Of Power. We live in a world which respects power above all things. Power, intelligently directed, can lead to more freedom. Unwisely directed it can be a dreadful destructive force. During my lifetime I have seen the power of the Negro grow enormously. It has always been my first concern that this power should be placed on the side of human justice.

Now that the barriers are crumbling everywhere, the Negro in America must be ever vigilant lest his forces be marshalled behind wrong causes and undemocratic movements. He must not lend his support to any group that seeks to subvert democracy. That is why we must select leaders who are wise and courageous, and of great moral stature and ability. We have great leaders among us today. We have had other great men and women in the past: Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Church Terrell. We must produce more qualified people like them, who will work not for themselves, but for others.

I Leave You Faith. Faith is the first factor in life devoted to service. Without faith nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible. Faith in God is the greatest power, but great too, is faith in oneself. In 50 years the faith of the American Negro in himself has grown immensely, and is still increasing. The measure of our progress as a race is in precise relation to the depth of the faith in our people held by our leaders. Frederick Douglass, genius though he was, was spurred by a deep conviction that his people would heed his counsel and follow him to freedom. Our greatest Negro figures have been imbued with faith. Their perseverance paid rich dividends. We must never forget their sufferings and their sacrifices, for they were the foundations of the progress of our people.

I Leave You Racial Dignity. I want Negroes to maintain their human dignity at all costs. We, as Negroes, must recognize that we are the custodians as well as the heirs of a great civilization. We have given something to the world as a race and for this we are proud and fully conscious of our place in the total picture of mankind's development. We must learn also to share and mix with all men. We must make an effort to be less race conscious and more conscious of individual and human values. I have never been sensitive about my complexion. My color has never destroyed my self respect nor has it ever caused me to conduct myself in such a manner as to merit the disrespect of any person. I have not let my color handicap me. Despite

many crushing burdens and handicaps, I have risen from the cotton fields of South Carolina to found a college, administer it during the years of growth, become a public servant in the government and country, and a leader of women. I would not exchange my color for all the wealth in the world, for had I been born white, I might not have been able to do all I have done or yet hope to do.

I Leave You A Desire To Live Harmoniously With Your Fellow Man. The problem of color is world-wide. It is found in Africa and Asia, Europe and South America. I appeal to American Negroes—both North and South, East and West—to recognize their common problems and unite to solve them.

I pray that we will begin to live harmoniously with the white race. So often, our difficulties have made us supersensitive and truculent. I want to see my people conduct themselves naturally in all relationships, fully conscious of their manly responsibilities and deeply aware of their heritage. I want them to learn to understand whites and influence them for good, for it is advisable for us to do so. We are a minority of fifteen million living side by side with a white majority. We must learn to deal with people positively and on an individual basis.

I Leave You, Finally, A Responsibility To Our Young People. The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow. Nor must they forget that the masses of our people are still underprivileged, ill-housed, impoverished and victimized by discrimination. We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.

Faith, Courage, Brotherhood, Dignity, Ambition, Responsibility — these are needed today as never before. We must cultivate them and use them as tools for our task of completing the establishment of equality for the Negro. We must sharpen these tools in the struggle that faces us and find new ways of using them. The Freedom Gates are half ajar. We must pry them fully open.

If I have a legacy to leave my people, it is my philosophy of living and serving. As I face tomorrow, I am content, for I think I have spent my life well. I pray now that my philosophy may be helpful to those who share my vision of a world of Peace.

Dr. Dorothy I. Height

National President

'Living link' to rights fight battles on

The Rev. Jesse Jackson calls Dorothy Height an "inspiration ... the living link with the civil rights and human rights movements."

At 73, Height is a matriarch in the civil rights struggle and president of the National Council of Negro Women.

The 4 million-member council is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a convention this weekend in Washington, D.C. Its mission: to harness "woman power" and create programs for hunger-relief, education, job opportunities and child care.

"Too little is known about black women," Height says from a wheelchair. Last month, an elevator door struck her, breaking her right hip and arm. "People forget about the strengths we have, the coping skills. We get lost between the cracks."

For years, the former social worker has been trying to plug those cracks.

She'll focus efforts next year on teen-age pregnancy and infant mortality.

"Race and sex are a double jeopardy," she says. "We are finding ourselves moving increasingly into poverty."

Height joined NCNW in 1937 when its founder, Mary McLeod Bethune, told her the fledgling organization needed her.

After Harlem broke out in riots in 1935, she was the first black named to a panel to address residents' concerns. Since then, she has won barrels of awards.

NCNW board member Yvonne Ewell of Dallas calls her a "late nighter and an early riser."

At 5-foot-4½, Height lives up to her name. The Richmond, Va., native lives in New York and relaxes with needlepoint, religious books or Agatha Christie novels.

— Steve Marshall



By David Halboim

MATRIARCH: Dorothy Height on USA's poor and black women: "Those who are behind are getting further behind."